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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the current state of language instruction and accompanying materials and describes elements of the Classroom Library Project in South Africa. The Project was initiated by the Department of Education to increase the supply of suitable material in African languages for elementary schools. Highlights include: shortcomings in terminology standards developed by Language Boards; inadequate vocabulary development; lack of appropriate texts for translation; shortage of language experts who are not already involved with the publishing industry; quality control and the future of the Project; advantages of classroom library collections; and effective utilization of school library resources. A table showing the provision of books to primary schools through the Project for the years 1983-1993 is appended. (Contains 12 references.) (AEF)

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The Classroom Library Project in South Africa

by
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Introduction

South Africa is currently restructuring its entire education system following the first democratic elections on 26 and 27 April 1994 and the establishment of an ANC-driven Government of National Unity. The sixteen ethnically-based education departments created by the previous Government are to be integrated to form one non-ethnic National Department of Education and Training and nine provincial education departments. As part of the restructuring process, the practices and projects of the existing education departments are being evaluated to determine priorities in the delivery of services.

School library services are also being scrutinized in the light of pressing educational needs, backlogs in services, and inadequate resources in those communities disadvantaged through previous Apartheid policies and practices. What is required are cost-effective services leading to qualitative and quantitative improvements in the education system.

Adding to the complexity and scope of the restructuring process, is the fact that South Africa is a multicultural and multilingual country. Eleven languages spoken in South Africa all enjoy equal status under the new interim constitution. These languages are Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Northern Sotho, Southern Sotho, Swazi, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa and Zulu.

Some of these languages are spoken by small sections of the community (for example Venda, Swazi and Tsonga), while others are spoken by fairly large groups (for example Zulu and Afrikaans) but not one language is spoken by the majority as a mother tongue. The geographic distribution of these languages further complicates matters as, as a result of urbanization, most languages are spoken in the larger industrial regions and it is only in the rural areas that they are, to a certain extent, localized.

This multilingualism has tremendous implications for education in South Africa. A child starting school at the age of six usually knows only his mother tongue well. Rich as that may be in the beliefs, concepts and traditions of his people, and expert as he may be in its use, as he climbs the educational ladder he must also acquire increasing linguistic facility in English as that language is preeminently the language of higher education, of commerce, industry and the professions.

The Classroom Library Project (African Languages)

The Department of Education and Train[ing, which under the previous government was responsible for education of the Black population of the RSA (excluding the former Homelands), has long realized the importance of developing pupils' language, reading and comprehension skills in the mother tongue thereby facilitating the transfer of these skills to other languages. It is for this reason that, in 1982, the Department initiated the Classroom Library Project with the aim of increasing the supply of suitable material in the mother-tongue to pupils in primary schools.

The Classroom Library Project encompasses the provision of library books to every class from Sub-standard A (Grade 1) up to and including Standard five (Grade 7) in the African language taught in that classroom. Through this project children are introduced to books at an early age as books are integrated into their classroom experience from the very first grade. It is hoped that this will be of lasting value, far beyond the confines of classroom and curriculum, as a reading culture is inculcated in these children, forming the basis of a lifelong skill essential for personal development and empowerment in a fast changing society.

Because of the scope of the project (there are currently approximately 7,000 primary schools involved), it was decided to implement it in different stages (Phases). The initial aim was to provide each school annually with ten titles per class per standard in the African language taught in that class. The ultimate objective was originally set at ninety titles per standard (per class).

This objective was, however, not fully realized. Some years, owing to a lack of adequate funding, only five or six titles could be

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purchased per standard. Problems associated with the translation of the titles into all the African languages taught in the schools were also experienced. (Up to now eight African languages have been taught at schools under the Department of Education and Training). It was also decided to supply Public schools (mainly in urban areas) and State Aided schools (mainly farm schools in rural areas) with library books every alternate year (See Appendix).

At present, the procedure for supplying books is as follows:

Publishers are invited by the Department to submit manuscripts with a view to their translation into the eight African languages taught in schools. The books are carefully selected as relevant children's literature, fiction as well as subject literature, depicting the real world and written in a narrative style of literary merit, is required for the project.

Although in the past it was necessary to depend mainly on translations as few books were written in African languages, today preference is given to original works in African languages. If translations are submitted, manuscripts must be presented in Afrikaans or English and at least one African language.

A panel, consisting of primary teachers and advisers, representative of the different language groups, assesses the relevancy of the content for the target groups (standards) concerned. Teachers and other persons with advanced qualifications in the African languages concerned are employed on a contractual basis (remunerated according to set hourly tariffs) to edit the page proofs for the Department. The final selection, made according to international educational and library criteria, rests with the selectors of the Media Centre Services Sub-directorate of the Department of Education and Training.

Publishers are encouraged to produce books which are as aesthetically pleasing as possible as the project aims at instilling a love of books and reading in pupils. Clear guidelines (specifications) are made available as to the approximate number of words per book per standard (grade) and the physical production of books, for example, the quality of the paper, letter size and type, and format. These specifications were drawn up after an analysis by departmental officials of the costing of the production of library books, and in consultation with other educationists, printers and publishers.

Before the Department places any orders, publishers are required to submit one tender price for each title across all eight languages into which the title has been translated. The purpose of this stipulation is to ensure that the languages spoken by small minorities, for example Venda, Tsonga and Swazi, are not disadvantaged because of higher costs resulting from limited print-runs.

In this way, attractive books which are educationally sound are available at affordable prices in the African languages taught in South African schools. Various problems are inherent in the process of translating books into African languages. Problem areas include:

Shortcomings in Standardization

In South Africa each African language has its own Language Board which is responsible for the standardization and development of that particular language. These bodies issue terminology lists incorporating the latest language and spelling rules adopted by the various Boards. However, these terminology lists are not published on a regular basis and are not widely distributed. As a result it is often very difficult to get consensus on the spelling and usage of certain words and expressions among language experts and between publishers and the editors employed by the Department.

In addition, the usage of a particular language may differ from region to region and the dialects spoken in townships often differ from those spoken in rural areas. Furthermore, some of the languages, such as Swazi, Xhosa and Zulu which fall in the same language group (Nguni), are similar; this also presents problems in translation.

Inadequate Vocabulary Development

On the whole African languages have not yet been developed sufficiently to incorporate all the modern technical and scientific vocabulary. This restricts the translation of non-fiction books.

Dearth of Appropriate Texts for Translation

Because the Classroom Library Project is concerned with library books for primary pupils, it is of the utmost importance that children are able to identify with the characters and with the setting and cultural context of the books. Many texts available for translation do not meet these requirements.

Shortage of Language Experts Not Already Involved with the Book Industry

To ensure objectivity and neutrality and to prevent favoritism, it is imperative that language experts employed by the Department to evaluate manuscripts have no links with the publishing industry. As many language experts (especially departmental officials) are approached by publishers to act as authors, translators and editors, it is often very difficult for the Department to obtain the services of neutral, unattached experts. It is precisely for this reason that the Department had to interrupt the provision of books in the African languages during 1990 and 1991. (See Appendix.)

Management and Quality Control

The continuous management and control of the project is very important but also time- consuming, especially the editing of texts in the African languages. To facilitate quality control, various control points have been built into the process, for example, the submission of final page proofs and inspection copies to ensure that the text is correct and the production complies with the specifications. Future of the Classroom Library Project in the new education dispensation

If the new government is serious about its commitment to the equality of all eleven languages, it is essential that this project continues in the new education dispensation. As stated by Professor Lenake of Unisa during an INFO AFRICA NOVA Conference on Publishing and Distribution in Africa, held on 19 - 20 May 1994, writing and publishing in the vernacular is only viable through the school market. Thus, only if publishers are assured of bulk purchasing by the government, will they be in a position to publish children's books in all the African languages taught in South African schools. This is especially the case with the minority languages, such as Venda, Swazi and Tsonga. At present, where children's books are published in African languages for the open market, they are mainly in Zulu, Xhosa and Northern Sotho.

A decision is still to be taken as to the future of the Project. If it is decided that the Project is to continue, a decision will also have to be taken as to whether it will be run at national level or at provincial level, perhaps as a cooperative project according to the language distribution in a particular province. In that case, the project could be coordinated at national level.

The Classroom Library Concept

Some people in developing countries such as South Africa appear to be of the opinion that classroom libraries are inferior substitutes for centralized school libraries - this sentiment was also expressed during the aforementioned INFO AFRICA NOVA Conference. However, although the decision, taken by the Department in 1982, to foster classroom library collections in primary schools was taken partly because the provision of centralized school libraries to primary schools was not found to be economically viable - in 1993 there were approximately 7 000 primary schools under the jurisdiction of the Department (South Africa. Department of Education and Training. 1993) - there is a definite didactic advantage in having library resources available where teaching and learning take place. Liesener (1985:12) points out that there is a solid relationship between proximity and use. The greater the distance, either physically or psychologically, the less likely it is that the resource will be used.

Mabomba (1990:15) believes that primary school graduates or dropouts who have acquired reading skills and habits are likely to remain literate in their later lives, given the proper literate environment. He is of the opinion that, although the influence of illiteracy is very strong in Africa, especially in the rural areas, the presence of easily accessible school library services will help to protect children from such influences. Classroom libraries can make an important contribution in this regard. This view is shared by READ, a Non-Government Organization which renders a supplementary school library service to schools in South Africa (READ. 1994:4).

Notwithstanding the advantages of classroom library collections, particularly in primary schools and the costs involved in supplying and equipping viable centralized libraries, there are high expectations that the new government will provide centralized school libraries for all schools in South Africa. If, however, one considers that there are more than 26 000 schools (South Africa. Department of National Education. 1992:10), it is doubtful whether the new government will be able to fulfil these expectations, especially in the light of the pressing need for additional classrooms.

Critics of the classroom library concept should note, however, the growing trend towards classroom libraries, even in developed countries. In Finland, for example, library accommodation also presents problems but, as

Haapsaari (1991:18) points out, very often the appreciation of the school library depends on the quality of its premises and fittings. One suggested solution is that emphasis should be placed on developing classroom libraries in Finland. In the report of The English Coalition Conference: Democracy through Language, a 21-day conference held in the USA by the National Council of Teachers of English and the Modern Language Association in 1987 (Barron, 1989:47), the development of the classroom library that "celebrates the diversity, backgrounds, interests, and potential of children" is also encouraged. It would therefore appear that the provision of classroom collections, at least as an interim measure, could be a possible means for the new government to ensure that all primary pupils have access to a variety of library resources, thus upgrading the quality of school education. (Bawa, 1993:179; Tötemeyer, 1994).

Effective Utilization of School Library Resources

Whether access to school library resources is provided by means of a classroom collection or a centralized school library is, however, not the decisive factor in assuring quality resource-based teaching and learning. It is well known that the mere provision of facilities does not necessarily lead to student gains in learning, to enriched learning experiences, or to improved teaching, but that the use of libraries and library materials needs to be mediated for maximum benefit (National Education Coordinating Committee. 1992:10). This fact was brought home to the Department when it was found that school library resources which had been provided, were grossly underutilized by teachers and pupils. Furthermore, the provision of school library resources has had little impact on the teaching practices which have remained predominantly teacher- and textbook centered.

It is for this reason that it was decided to develop supportive material to assist primary teachers in fully utilizing the classroom library material provided by the Department. A teaching guide and video Using books is fun, based on the English and Afrikaans books provided to schools during 1990 and 1991 has thus been developed. This guide analyses the books and provides ideas for using the books across the curriculum in classroom teaching. It is hoped that this guide and video will stimulate the use of classroom library material and contribute towards the promotion of resource-based learning and teaching in primary schools.

Conclusion

The new government has stated that lifelong learning is an essential structural objective for education if the objectives of a democratic society are to be met (African National Congress. Education Department. 1994:73). The provision of classroom collections to primary schools and the Classroom Library Project endeavors to make an important contribution in this regard.

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APPENDIX

Provision of Books to Primary Schools Through the Classroom Library Project

Phase	Year	Titles	No. Of Books	Language	Spent	Schools	Classes
1	1983	40	483,000	8 African Languages	R1,400,000	Public Primary 1,220	SSA-STD 2
2	1984	40	251,000	8 African Languages	R700,000	State Aided Primary (Farm Schools) 5,500	SSA-STD 2
3	1985	69	85,000	English Afrikaans	R600,000	Public Primary 1,440	STD 3-5
4	1986	37	805,500	8 African Languages	R2,800,000	Public Primary 470	SSA-STD 5
5	1987	37	550,000	5 African Languages	R1,990,000	State Aided Primary (Farm Schools) 5,700	SSA-STD 5
6	1988	75	460,000	8 African Languages	R2,800,000	Public Primary 600	SSA-STD 5
7	1989	75	411,000	8 African Languages	R2,400,000	State-Aided Primary (Farm Schools) 5,700	SSA-STD 5
8	1990	52	173,000	English Afrikaans	R3,300,000	Public Primary Schools 1,200	STD 3-5
9	1991	36	134,000	English Afrikaans	R2,700,000	State-Aided Primary (Farm Schools) 4,600	STD 3-5
10	1993	32	314,000	8 African Languages	R3, 500, 000	Public Primary School (1,699) 1,700	*SSA STD 2

SSA=Grade 1=1st Year of formal schooling *19,000 Classes

Republic of South Africa, Department of Education & Training, Sub-Directorate Educational Technology, Media Centre Services Section, 1993. *Information Sheet*, p.4.